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SUBJECT: SCENE-SETTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN MOLDOVA'S
AUTONOMOUS REGION OF GAGAUZIA

Sensitive But Unclassified. Please Protect Accordingly.

11. (SBU) Summary: Legislative elections in Moldova's autonomous region of Gagauzia have been scheduled for March 16. Lack of funding has created uncertainty about whether the elections may have to be cancelled, but Gagauz leaders are still working on reaching an agreement with the central government. Candidate registration finished February 14, with 160 candidates running for 35 seats in the Gagauz People's Assembly. Three major political forces will compete in the race: candidates promoted by Bashkan (Governor) of Gagauzia Mihail Formuzal, candidates supported by the Communist Party, which has a majority of seats in the current legislature, and candidates supported by Mayor of Comrat Nicolai Dudoglo. With Communist Party influence weakening in Gagauzia, prospects look good for Formuzal to gain a clear majority in the People's Assembly. End summary.

Election Mechanics

12. (SBU) Elections for the People's Assembly (the local Gagauz legislature) have been set for March 16. This legislative body has 35 members, elected for 4-year terms in single constituencies. Each constituency has 5,000 registered voters and is split into voting precincts. To win, a candidate must poll more than 50% of the votes cast in the constituency. If no candidate polls more than 50%, a run-off round between the top two vote getters in the first round follows in two weeks. The election is conducted by the Gagauz Election Commission (GEC), a non-permanent body created on an ad-hoc basis. It has 9 members, with the People's Assembly, the Governor and Gagauz courts each appointing three members. Candidates for the People's Assembly nominated by political parties and movements do not need to collect support signatures, while independent candidates need 300 signatures.

Problems with Funding

13. (SBU) Because Gagauzia has not yet received any funding from the central government for carrying out the elections a shadow of uncertainty about the prospect of holding the elections hangs over the process. The PCRM and the Bashkan are each claiming the lack of funding on the other. Bashkan Mikhail Formuzal has met with Prime Minister Tarlev, Parliamentary Speaker Lupu and the Moldovan Central Election Commission in an effort to secure funding for the elections. Some anti-Formuzal Gagauz deputies issued a statement February 11 in the name of the People's Assembly Presidium blaming the Bashkan for his failure to allocate money for the elections from Gagauzia's budget. The Bashkan, in turn, blames the central government for not providing the funding that Gagauzia needs for the conduct of its elections. The Minister of Finance offered Gagauzia a loan of 1,200,000 lei (about 106,000 USD), but the Bashkan refused

the loan, saying that the central government should be responsible for paying for Gagauz elections just as it paid for the 2007 local elections. Without funding, the GEC is unable to print ballots and campaign materials.

Multi-candidate elections

4 (U) Candidate registration finished February 14, with 160 candidates for the 35 seats in the Gagauz parliament, an average of 4.6 candidates per mandate. Exactly half of the candidates, 80, are running as independents, while the other 80 represent 10 political parties. The largest number of party-affiliated candidates (26) is from the Communist Party (PCRM). The large number of independents stems from the past that Gagauz-specific regional parties cannot register without meeting the national registration requirements of 500 members in each raion. Formuzal heads the Yedinaya Gagauzia (United Gagauzia) movement, which is technically an NGO, as it cannot register as a political party. More than half of the candidates listed as independents are actually supporters of Yedinaya Gagauzia.

15. (SBU) Three major political forces will compete in the election: candidates supported by Formuzal, candidates supported by the PCRM and those supported by Mayor of Comrat Nicolae Dudoglo. Formuzal's victory in 2006 has left him in a difficult relationship with the PCRM-controlled People's Assembly, which has important budgetary authority and oversight powers over the executive. The PCRM does not want to lose its majority in the People's Assembly, but its popularity appears to be low. By contrast, Formuzal is seeking to build on his 2006 victory. As mayor, Dudoglo (who lost the 2006 run-off for Bashkan to Formuzal) is popular in Comrat, but he is far weaker than Formuzal outside of Comrat.

Comment: What are the Stakes?

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16. (SBU) Our Gagauz contacts suggest that the PCRM is likely to lose control of the People's Assembly. If Formuzal wins a majority, it will be far easier for him to garner support for his policies. With the legislature behind him, Formuzal's key challenge will be effectively managing the balance of power in his relationship with the central government. The current struggle over funding for the elections is partially the result of lack of clarity in the separation of powers between central government and autonomy, but is a clear reflection of the uneasy relationship between the two. The Ambassador plans to visit Gagauzia on March 3.

Kirby